

Contact: Gwen Driscoll, 310-794-0930

Grim health picture for California's low-income kids
They're more likely to have gaps in insurance coverage and rely on public programs, according to new research. But the number of overweight children from all economic backgrounds is declining.

October 7, 2008 - There are some positives – the number of overweight children in California declined slightly and preschool enrollment increased. Yet the overall health picture, especially for California's low-income kids, is grim according to a new research brief "*Trends in the Health of Young Children in California*" by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and sponsored by First 5 California.

The brief found that two-thirds of children without health insurance are from low-income families. Low-income children utilize community clinics for primary care at three times the rate of higher income children. And the proportion of children enrolled in private health insurance is shrinking – while the reliance on public programs is growing.

"The research suggests there has been a steady erosion of health care and health access for the most vulnerable children," said David Grant, lead author of the policy research brief and director of the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS). "As Californians, we have a lot of work to do to reverse the trend."

The research brief examined trends in health among Californian children from a wide range of ethnicities and economic backgrounds. It is based upon an analysis of data collected by CHIS, the nation's largest state health survey, in 2001, 2003 and 2005. Conducted by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, CHIS surveys up to 50,000 Californians – including up to 10,000 children – every two years.

"There is no higher priority than the health and well-being of our children," said Kris Perry, executive director of First 5 California. "This research brief provides a valuable reminder of where our priorities must be, even at a time of scarce resources."

Researchers drew upon those interviews for "*Trends in the Health of Young Children in California*."

Among their findings:

- **Fewer overweight children:** The prevalence of overweight children ages 0-5 dropped slightly in California from 14% in 2001 to 12% in 2005. There were steep drops in Riverside County (16.2% in 2003 to 12.4% in 2005) and San Bernardino County (16.2% in 2003 to 8.4% in 2005). Los Angeles County also dropped (14.3% in 2003 to 12.8% in 2005) as well as Alameda County (13.4% in 2003 to 8.9% in 2005) and San Diego County (12.9% in 2003 to 8.5% in 2005).

- **No improvement in health insurance coverage:** The proportion of children ages 0-5 in California who lacked health insurance for all or part of the previous year – one in ten children – remained unchanged between 2001 and 2005.
- **Low-income kids more likely to have gaps in coverage:** Among those with gaps in health insurance coverage, more than two-thirds were from low-income families.
- **Racial disparities:** White and Asian children have the fewest gaps in health coverage while Latino children consistently have the most.
- **Increased use of public programs:** Between 2001 and 2005, the percent of children ages 0-5 covered by private health insurance decreased three percentage points, while public coverage increased nearly five percentage points.
- **Greater dependency on public clinics and hospitals:** In the same period, the percent of children attending a private doctor's office as their usual source of care decreased almost nine percentage points, while those attending a public clinic or hospital as their usual source of care increased nearly nine percentage points.
- **Good news in dental care:** Between 2001 and 2005, yearly dental visits increased 55% to 63% among one year olds with teeth and children ages 2-5.
- **More kids in preschool:** 300,000 more children received preschool education in 2005 than in 2003. But three out of five children ages three and four were still not enrolled in preschool in 2005, and enrollment is lowest among low-income children.

ABOUT THE UCLA CENTER FOR HEALTH POLICY RESEARCH

The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research is one of the nation's leading health policy research centers and the premier source of health policy information for California. The Center also conducts the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), the nation's largest state health survey.

For more information on the Center: www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu.

For more information on CHIS: www.askchis.com

About First 5 California

First 5 California, also known as the California Children and Families Commission, was established after voters passed Proposition 10 in November 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to fund education, health, child care and other programs for expectant parents and children up to age 5. For more information please visit www.First5California.com.